

Dear Friends,

I had an amazing season in Kings Canyon and I'd like to share more about what I learned and gained from my experience.

I had little awareness of what I was in for in accepting a position with the California Conservation Corps/ AmeriCorps Backcountry Trails Program. However, it was soon after beginning work in Kings Canyon National Park that I knew I was part of something very special.

Every work day was rigorously scheduled. Up before 6 am, make a lunch, breakfast at 6:30, [camp] chores, physical training and then work begins at 8 am. Work ends at 4:30, break until 5:30 (to bathe in the river), dinner, chores, and community meeting in the evening. We had almost no personal time. The work was physically demanding, everyday you were pushed (hopefully you motivated yourself), to do your best, to hike faster and farther. Limits were tested and comfort zones were broken.

Home was my tent. I carried everything I needed to live, which was minimal—clothes, some music, a journal, etc. We lived at four different camps through the season, sometimes 15 miles or more from the nearest road, store, or telephone. Our only signs of the outside world were airplanes far overhead.

Day to day living became so simple. I knew where everything came from and where it ended up. I would have to filter water from the river to drink. We learned the ways of backcountry living, of using a sump for dish water, digging a [latrine], building a kitchen out of log shelves and bathing in the ice cold river daily. We were also constantly aware of bear hazards and keeping all our food and any other fragrant items locked up. Our resources were limited as food, mail, and supplies were delivered via mule trains. By the end of our season, our resupplies were limited to twice a month. These conditions force conservation and constant awareness of consumption.

But aside from all this was the fact that we were not only a functioning trail crew, but a tightly knit community. With 22 different backgrounds and experiences, how do you get along and live with one another. We started by establishing what makes a healthy community and how to treat each other in a positive learning environment. We definitely had our differences, but we learned. You were forced to learn, living so close as we were. All these buzz words circulated throughout the season: integrity, personal accountability, adaptability, patience, humility, communication and so forth.

Words really don't do justice to the transformation that occurs in everyone. Living out in the backcountry anywhere for 5 ½ months is bound to change anyone, but living and achieving this indescribable state, being able to find support and strength from a crewmate when your body was wasted or when you were homesick. A place where I could say today was the best day of my life, I've seen the most beautiful scenery on the planet and yet, two days or two weeks later, I could say the same thing again and I wasn't alone in thinking that.

Backcountry taught us all something special that can't be described. It's not something that can be brought, or earned in school. I could say I gained a new appreciation for our national parks or the outdoors, but the real benefit was the change in life perspective. We not only gained new friends, but we also learned, (at times the hard way), courage, trust, humility, respect, hard work, and perseverance.

As for what lies next, I'm not sure. Perhaps I'll do another season at Mammoth and hopefully more seasons of trail work and eventually more education. But I do know that I am better prepared for any situation that life may throw at me, whether in relationships, at work, or at home.

Thank you all for listening and being a special part of my life.

Much love,

Agnes Vianzon --- Kings Canyon 2002